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ABSTRACT

In May 1988, at the request of State Superintendent for Instruction John Folks, about 50 Oklahoma school superintendents, legislators, association executives, and state department staff met to discuss education and economic development linkages. Participants heard numerous speakers, including superintendents, business representatives, economists, researchers, and community group representatives. Common themes were recognition that: (1) education-economic development linkages must change because the U.S. economy has become service-based; (2) luring industries to relocate in a community is largely futile; (3) central city school district adequacy is the key to community growth; and (4) local superintendents have substantive roles in economic development. Keynote speaker Alice MacDonald, Kentucky's former state superintendent, emphasized the superintendent's role as instructional leader, and the Southwestern Bell Telephone Area community relations manager stressed the importance of school systems as major employers. Augie Woodard, a superintendent and president of his community's chamber of commerce, suggested that the role of instructional leader merges with that of community leader. Several other speakers noted school-business partnerships as the key to improving educational quality and economic growth. A sidebar details ways for school districts to link education and economic development. (MLH)

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INSIGHTS ON POLICY AND PRACTICE

Information Services from SEDL's ED-AIDE Program

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INSIGHTS ON POLICY AND PRACTICE

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The Superintendent: Vital Link Between Education and Economic Development

"If we're going to get serious about economic development, we have to get serious about education," said John Folks, then Oklahoma State Superintendent for Instruction. "I happen to believe that superintendents are the ones who are going to have a major role in changing education in this state."

To examine the issue, Folks asked ED-AIDE, SEDL'S policy information services project, to plan a two-day retreat for selected superintendents and policymakers to investigate two primary questions: what strategies have other states developed to link agricultural or resource-based economies and education, and what roles can superintendents effectively play to revitalize their local economies?

The Vital Link

In May 1988, about 50 Oklahoma school superintendents, legislators, association executives and state department staff met to discuss the link between education and economic development. Participants heard a range of speakers selected by Oklahoma State Department of Education Executive Officer Pat Crist and ED-AIDE staffers Joyce Pollard and Magdalena Rood. The roster included superintendents, business representatives, economists, researchers and representatives of community groups from Oklahoma and other states.

"Linking education and economic development is easy. Unlinking them is hard. They are inseparable," said Roy Sadler, Chairman of the Oklahoma Senate Committee on Economic Development.

Daryl Hobbs, Director of the Office of Social and Economic Data Analysis at the University of Missouri, agreed. "The link between education and economic development is not new, but it has changed because the economy has been transformed." The American economy has changed from a production-based to a service-based economy, and service sector businesses don't demand the same level of capital investment that goods production does. Consequently, more jobs are now being created by small businesses than large. In Oklahoma, for example, 89 percent of all businesses employ 19 or fewer employees.

Local economic development efforts must change as well. Hobbs and Larkin Warner, Professor of Economics at Oklahoma State University, agreed that trying to lure industries to relocate in a community is an outdated, even futile strategy for many communities. Instead, Warner said, community leaders must "make that community a good place to live and to do business for the people already there. The adequacy of the central city school district is key to the ability of the community to grow. Short-run economic development can lead to an imbalanced system.

Don Bumpass, Director of the Oklahoma Council on Economic Education at OSU, suggested a strategy. "If economic development is a goal, then an important element in achieving that goal is educating Oklahomans about what economic development is and is not."

Participants agreed that local superintendents have substantive roles to play in economic development. "The reality of life is that the schools will continue, for some time, to be asked to take on the solutions to societal as well as educational problems," said Arkansas legislator Jodie Mahony. Mahony, a pivotal figure in Arkansas' education reform movement, added, "Superintendents continue to bear the major responsibility for this duty."

Instructional and Community Leaders

Local superintendents seek to provide good educational systems that educate all students, train or re-train the labor force, educate the community about economic development and enhance the quality of community life. The superintendent, then, must assume leadership as both instructional and community leader in today's economy.

Instructional Leader. Keynote speaker Alice McDonald, Kentucky's former Superintendent of Public Instruction, emphasized the superintendent's role on the education side of the education/economic link. "We don't expect you to attract a General Motors plant, but we do expect you to put the boys and girls together right. If I had to tell you the one single, most important role that you have as a superintendent, it is that you must run good educational systems."

The reasons for doing so are obvious. Citing her experiences as Kentucky's Chief State School Officer, McDonald said, "Every corporate head wanted to know about the educational system in Kentucky. First and foremost, they wanted to know what kind of person that system would produce and then they wanted to know what kind of system their own children would attend."

Concentrating on the education side of the education/economic link does not prevent the superintendent from attending to broader community matters. Often, "the school system is the biggest employer," noted Alnoma Dinger, Southwestern Bell Telephone Area Manager for Community Relations. The skills that superintendents learn managing their districts can be used to enhance the economic development efforts of the community. As community leaders, Dinger said, "superintendents have real input into what happens in their communities."

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Community Leader.

The role of instructional leader merges with the role of community leader, says Audie Woodard, Superintendent of Seminole Public Schools and President of the Seminole Chamber of Commerce. "The superintendent really needs to feel the pulse of the community," not just that of business. A "total involvement in the community" is absolutely necessary for the superintendent to be an effective spokesperson to businesses, industry, social and civic groups, according to Seminole Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Bob Jones. The involved superintendent can reap benefits when the community supports necessary school bond issues, Jones said.

"What you really want is for the community to become advocates of the schools," said Nancy O'Brian, Norman Schools Assistant Superintendent.

The Strategy: "Partnershipping"

"Partnershipping is the key" to improving the quality of education and fostering economic growth, said Craig Knutson, Area Manager in Administrative Forecasting and Economic Analysis for Southwestern Bell. Superintendents develop partnerships through dialogue with members of the community: the private sector, community members and policymakers.

Knutson emphasized that money is *not* the key to private sector involvement in education. The *time* that corporations can donate is more important. Companies like Southwestern Bell and IBM have worked with several schools in Oklahoma to provide materials, equipment and human resources.

Vivian Kidd, Executive Director of the Education Fund for West Virginia, described the Fund as an example of statewide partnerships between the schools and the private sector. The six year-old foundation is a private organization working "outside of, but on behalf of public education."

Business/industry is not the only sector for whom communication is key. Superintendents develop partnerships with community constituents by sharing their ideas and needs, said OSU's Bumpass. Jimmie Heard, superintendent for Milburn, agreed. "My role as superintendent is to lead by example." That means letting the community know that good schools are important. Heard regularly attends community meetings, parent meetings and school staff meetings to rally the community around educational issues.

Maintaining dialogue between superintendents and constituents is also the preferred strategy for working with state-and local-level policymakers. Legislator Jodie Mahony observed," Legislators must have accurate, timely, truthful information about the schools and will work more frequently with those who provide it than those who do not." Steve Lewis, Chairman of the Oklahoma House Appropriations Committee, commented that the best thing that superintendents can do to have an influence on education policy is to get the people in the community talking about what a good job the schools are doing.★

Linking Education and Economic Development: The Experts Tell How

Superintendents and Chamber of Commerce executives are already linking education and economic development throughout the Southwest. They suggest that these efforts are appropriate for any district:

- ★ *Become a member of advisory committees to your local Chamber of Commerce and other civic organizations.*
- ★ Blow your own horn. Establish a communications network about how your school system operates, what it does, what it needs.
- ★ *Create opportunities to talk regularly with the local community and business leaders and parents. Forums, luncheons, and superintendents' roundtables are formats that have worked for others.*
- ★ In one district, the local superintendent, the Chamber of Commerce executive director, the city manager and the editor of the newspaper meet monthly.
- ★ *Explore with local businesses and civic groups ways they might contribute resources to students and teachers. Partnerships can vary from simple sponsorship to sponsoring summer internships for students, teachers, or students with their teachers.*
- ★ Create ways for you and your teachers to talk with companies that develop educational technologies, so that developers know what schools need in terms of various school populations.
- ★ *A community's strongest attraction is a high quality school system. Work with community leaders to establish a foundation to support the highest possible quality of the system.*

INSIGHTS, *an update on innovations and emerging topics related to educational policy and practice, will be produced by ED-AIDE, SEDL's policy information service project for educators and decisionmakers. For more information, or if you have suggestions about topics that interest you, call Joyce Pollard, 512/476-6861.*

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